

# THE RIGHT TO LABOR AND LIVE

Copy of an Article by

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For further exposition see "EDEN OF LABOR" by the same Author.

Forty years ago, when the unemployed workmen of Lyons marched through the streets under a banner on which was inscribed the motto . . . . "*Vivre en travaillant ou mourir en combattant.*" . . . . (Toiling to live or fighting unto death), a thrill of indignation and affright ran through the nerves of the world. The world was astonished at the announcement which the inscription implied, that labor was a *right*. That it was the poor man's duty, every votary of Plutus affirmed; but that the duty implied the right, while also the duty and the right implied that there should be some form and method of carrying them into effect, were ideas few minds had conceived. The world should have known, that both Christianity and Philosophy sanctioned the proletarian's honest demand for work and life. "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt live," is the sentence God pronounced on the man going out of Eden. No one is exempted. Centuries ago, St. Paul said, and after him every theologian

and moralist teaches, that he who will not work should not eat. It follows, that he who will work has a right to have work and earn a living. Else death by starvation would not be inflicted only on unwillingness to labor, but might also be suffered by willingness. There would be no distinct penalty inflicted on voluntary idleness as the precept implies. It would be a vain fulmination. The innocent and the guilty would be condemned indiscriminately. Hence, the willing man, if individuals do not give him work at living wages, may summon society to provide it. He could not have been deprived of it but by some error or offence imputable to society itself.

But, it was the other branch of the motto the world disliked the most; for, instead of appealing to the ballot, it threatened arms and battle to enforce the right to labor and live. In this, under the circumstances, the world was not wrong; for the right of suffrage had been secured and was enjoyed in France.



Where universal suffrage is established by the constitution, a resort to arms to force a political or social change, can only be excused on the ground of extreme wrong and immediate necessity. Moreover, even when every door of peaceable reform is closed, force should be resorted to only by an almost unanimous consent and great probability of early success. Otherwise civil war would arise. Then, by civil war, the ruin and distress would be made greater than before; and, as it generally happens, corruption and usurpation would follow.

Not only is the right of earning a living by labor recognized by religion and philosophy; but governments have always, though reluctantly and stintedly acknowledged it. Rome really did so when, unable to furnish work to her proletarians, she satisfied their cry for bread and the circus. England confessed it as the ground of her jealous and hypocritical poor laws. The assize of bread, in France, is one of the modes in which the State gives effect to this right. The price of bread is fixed by law below the purchasing power of workmen's wages; and when the market price of flour is so high that the baker would lose by selling at that price, the government indemnifies him: pays him the difference out of the public treasury. So, almost every government, in some form or other, concedes the right of the poor to labor and live, and the obligation of society to insure them against any deprivation of this right.

The political economists and legislators of England (copied by those of the United States) imagine that if society, in good faith and without oppression, were to find work for every man claiming it to earn a living, the course of trade would be deranged; investments of capital would be rendered precarious and unprofitable; enterprise

would be checked and defeated; over-production would be occasioned; and a ruinous competition of overflowing markets induced. From *their* point of view, this is no doubt a correct statement of what would be the effect on *their* interests, if productive labor always had full employment and reward. They know that if independently of them, the toilers could procure the necessary soil, machinery and advances, a consequent equitable state of industry would follow, and the death blow of exceptional riches would be struck. Gain-gotten capital would cease to make more gain; usury would find her occupation gone, and her treasures sunk to par; and labor would have its own. Hence when the inexorable master-appropriators discharge their wagemen—refuse work and wages to great numbers—drive men to become tramps, vagrants and beggars, they, at the same time, furiously and unceasingly oppose and strive to thwart any attempt government or society may make to enable the unemployed not only to work, but to organize their work so as to produce all needed subsistence and comforts without being dependent on the option or interests of profit-seeking enterprisers.

In order to hinder the starving poor whom they do not employ in their shops, factories and fields from doing productive work, the stern and cynical masters put on the mask of charity, and under pretence of relieving distress, and giving effect to the right of living by labor, have founded that so-called philanthropic but really inhuman institution known as the WORK HOUSE. From it they, with insidious design, banish not only every comfort and adequate subsistence, but also remunerative and judicious work. Those who are compelled to become its inmates are treated as criminals. No distinction is allowed there between the able-bodied who



are willing to work but cannot find employment, and the able-bodied who because they will not work, have been committed for vagrancy. The work the inmates are set to is always of a fruitless nature. No wages are paid for it. The food furnished is purposely insufficient and repulsive. The living room is constructed on so narrow a scale as to be over crowded when occupied by the average number of refugees and vagrants. Husband, wife, and child are not allowed to live together while in the establishment. In short, every means, except direct and forcible expulsion, are cunningly applied to drive the refugees away.

Now, Social Economy, not Political Economy, having regard to these facts, and acting under the influence of God and Neighbor-Love which makes her science, proposes an honest compliance with the demand of every toiler who asks to live by his labor. She intends that productive and remunerative work for every able-bodied man shall be provided; that there shall be no competition between the toilers to procure employment; that the oligarchs of Mammon who now possess the power of deciding who shall and who shall not have work and wages, and what shall be the kind and amount of that work, and the rate of those wages, shall lose this egregious mastery; that there shall be no cut-downs, no lockouts, no strikes, no tramps, no under-production and under-consumption, no long hours and short wages; but that reasonable toil shall obtain, universally, its just and abundant reward.

Many are the measures which Social Economy may take to carry out this intention, but there is one of them to which to-day I would direct the reader's special attention. It is conceived for the purpose (1), of procuring and securing labor and

living for the presently unemployed; and (2), of saving the toilers from the necessity of competing with each other for work and wages. Put into practice, it would compel the master-enterprisers to pay full wages; and, if they cannot afford adequate wages, compel them to give up their business, without in the least distressing the laborers they cease to employ.

The mighty instrument by which this result could be effected, is the POLYTECHNIC TOWNSHIP.

Before I describe it, I should mention that though it might be instituted by private associated effort, I propose that the first one be organized and set to work by society itself.

A Polytechnic Township is a *voluntary* association of men of many and various productive industries, to the end that all might have sure work and an abundant living from that work. It has several essential and distinctive characteristics.

1. The kind of industries the township engages in, are only such as are proper for the production of *all* things necessary and commodious. It carries on no work or trade in sumptuous, luxurious, or pernicious things.

2. It admits members from each trade in such *proportion* to the whole number of all trades, that the production or service of each trade will be adequate to the needs of all the members needing that production or service; no more, no less.

3. It regulates the labor of each trade, so that each needed article is produced in such quantity as the township should consume, without leaving a surplus; except when a surplus is necessary to procure from outside those things which, from some insuperable reason, cannot be produced within the township itself, for its own consumption.

4. The ideal of the Polytechnic Town-



ship is, that it shall, besides being self-supplying be also *self-sufficient*, as entirely as surrounding conditions will permit and as ingenious industry can make it.

5. The products are distributed among the co-operatives according to the labor-time of each; and they effect exchanges on the principle of average labor-time-value.

Hence to provide RAW MATERIALS and FOOD it has members who are ploughmen, reapers, gardeners, dairymen, shepherds, bee-tenders, orchardists, woodchoppers, miners, butchers, bakers, cooks, *etc*; to make CLOTHING it has spinners, weavers, washers, dyers, tanners, shoemakers, hatters, tailors, milliners, seamstresses, *etc*; for erecting HABITANTS, and other buildings or receptacles, it has carpenters, joiners, coopers, brickmakers, bricklayers, stone cutters, masons, *etc*; for making its own TOOLS and engines, it has blacksmiths, locksmiths, cutlers, foundrymen, machinists, copper and brass workers, tinner, wheelwrights, millwrights, cabinetmakers, turners, *etc*; for EDUCATION it has schoolmasters, lecturers, preachers, and other teachers, printers, *etc*; and all these are marshalled in carefully estimated economic proportions, so that all of them are every day productively occupied, and that the operative of one trade or branch may take part in the work of others, whenever necessary or beneficial; and so that the time and strength of no one is wasted in idleness.

It is calculated that a township occupying an area six miles square (say, 23,000 acres) should have and could maintain about ten thousand inhabitants. With this space and number, the *proportional* grouping and labors of the members is easy and advantagous. As to the land, it is not absolutely necessary for it to be all in one body. It may be expediant to

locate different industries in separate situations: a factory here, a field there, a saw-mill elsewhere. The essentials are, that the inhabitants be associated; that the results of their industry be equitably distributed under the common control; that they have their reward according to the average labor-time standard of "proportionalism;" and that no drones or speculator's gouge profit or usury from their productions.

But, exclaims the Political Economist, if society were to furnish the means of founding many such townships (say, one in every district), and the laboring classes were to avail themselves of it and succeed in their enterprise, the effect would be to deplete the labor market, save the laborers from competing with each other for employment, and raise the price of wages.

Yes, the Social Economist replies, of course that would be the result, and this is precisely one of the effects it is intended the establishment of Polytechnic Townships shall have.

But, says Political Economy, a rise in wages would be ruinous to our existing textile, wood, and metal manufactories of all kinds. They would make no profit on their invested capital. They could not compete with other countries in foreign markets unless, by cheap labor at home, they are enabled to offer cheap goods abroad. They cannot secure a foreign trade, unless they can underbid and undersell the world; and there is only one way to do this: it is to reduce the cost of labor lower here than it is any where else, and nothing but a continual glut of the labor market will have this effect.

True, says Social Economy, but why should we care for foreign trade, on such terms, if labor can be self-supplying and self sufficient at home? Let a few individual enterprisers become insolvent, cease



to make profit on their capital, if they can maintain themselves only by subjecting a great multitude of toilers to harder and harder work, and to poorer and poorer reward. By their absurd cupidity and competition they ruin themselves anyhow, undersell one other, alternately overwork and underwork in the most capricious manner, speculate, embezzle, and go into bankruptcy. Why should the people in general want that this, that or the other individual should have the opportunity to become inordinately richer than others? None should, and every one that tries to become so deserves to be ruined. What is desirable is, an economic order by which the happy prosperity of the greatest number would be secured, and not a system of which the natural effect is to evolve a few monstrous fortunes out of the substance of the bodies and souls of their God-made equals. Yes their equals, not only physically and intellectually under God in nature, but their superiors morally and industrially before God in society. I see no reason why I should be sorry if the appropriators were reduced to poverty; for then, whether for weal or for woe, they would only participate in the common destiny, from which they have no just title to be exempted.

But, says Political Economy, if Polytechnic Townships were numerous or generally inaugurated, rent and profit would cease, and as a consequence no one would borrow money to carry on commercial or industrial enterprises.

Precisely, answers Social Economy, this is the effect they would have.

But then, argues Political Economy, if profit and rent, and as a consequence usury also, were to cease, the masters would close their factories and workshops, stop their enterprises and improvements of all kinds, discontinue investments which de-

velop resources; and then the wagemen in great hordes would be thrown out of employment: capitalists would refuse advances to productive labor of all kinds, and hence production itself would be arrested; famine, pestilence, destitution and riot would be occasioned; society itself would be dissolved; and moral chaos and physical misery become universal.

No, replies the Social Economist, for your argument presupposes the existence of numerous Polytechnic Townships, as the cause of the cessation of rent, profit and usury. The evils you predict could not take place if society were to establish as many self-supporting and self-sufficient townships as (by reason of the dog in a manger policy of the masters) might become necessary. In such townships, the people would produce by themselves, and distribute among themselves all things necessary. Indeed the master appropriators would be glad to sell out their establishment to newly formed associations of toilers, or to society, for cash, for annuities, or other reasonable indemnity; and every manufactory so purchased would be made a proportional element of a Polytechnic Township. Peace and abundance would prevail notwithstanding the financial catastrophe which would befall the masters individually; and most of them would gladly accept and enjoy the new industrial order founded on Christian justice.

But, says the Political Economist, insisting still on his views, this Polytechnic Township is to be composed of voluntary members: only those who enter it of their own free will and accord. Hence, those who are out of employment may refuse to enter it, while those who are at work and earning wages may quit their employers to become associates. Is not this contradictory? It is to furnish work



to those who happen to be idle but are willing to work, that the plan of founding these Polytechnic Townships is proposed to society. To be consistent with its origin, this contrivance should be carried into effect by sending only idle persons there, and setting them to work under sentence of the law, whether they are willing or not.

Nay, responds the Social Economist, we repel any imitation whatever of the infamous British Workhouse. We refuse to restrict liberty when it is not absolutely necessary to do so. Whether those who enter a Polytechnic Township come out of the factories and workshops or from among the unemployed it matters not, provided they come in sufficient number to relieve the labor-market and save the toilers from competing with each other, and so change the solicitation to the side of the masters. If the employed leave their masters to join the township, they would thereby create vacancies in the factories and shops they leave, and the unemployed who do not care to go to the township would be engaged to fill their places. Either way, the effect must be the same. The labor market would be equalized; and at the same time no one would be coerced or oppressed.

But, says the Political Economist, the tramps and other idlers may not avail themselves of the opportunity, may prefer doing nothing but roam over the country, begging and stealing, so that the Polytechnic Township would injure the masters of mines, farms, foundries, workshops and factories by enticing their industrious operatives away, without diminishing the number of the indolent and unoccupied.

This, replies the Social Economist, is not a valid objection; for it assumes that voluntary vagrancy would enjoy immunity. On the contrary, if men will beg or steal,

despite the suffering and danger of such conduct, rather than work, then the consequences declared by law and religion should be inexorably laid upon them. Mark you, I suppose the case of available employment being evaded. I have no charity or compassion for wilful idlers, and do not plead their cause. Social Economy is their implacable enemy. They should be forced to work or starve. A workhouse is too good for them. Hard labor in a penitentiary is their due. Remember, however, I say this only for the time when a living by labor shall have been secured by means of the Polytechnic Township, recognized and carried into effect by the laws. To tell an able-bodied fellow, asking for labor to go to work, is now-a-days a heartless sarcasm. If, however, society itself honestly proffers free and requited labor to all, and yet some, though able to work, persist in vagrancy, than society may justly punish them. Society will have done its duty in regard to them; and their attempt to live as parasites upon the labor of others would be inexcusable, and indeed, a crime. But to suppose that there is a numerous class of such people is a mere fancy. The destitution of an idle life is not so agreeable as to be preferred to a sufficient subsistence obtained by honest labor. Generally men are tramps, beggars and paupers, because they cannot help it. Few, (and these are cheats), find sufficient support in such a life.

But, Political Economy doubtfully asks, where will society derive the funds which would be required to create these Polytechnic Townships?

From several resources, Social Economy replies. A great part of the amount necessary for beginning is already available. That portion of the Public Charity Fund now used to relieve able bodied paupers might be taken at once. Work-



houses, poor houses, soup-houses, night refuges, and the like, would become useless, and the large sums expended annually to support them without return, would pay for building and furnishing Polytechnic Townships. If this did not suffice, well then, let the rest be raised by taxation. It is from taxation that society has heretofore drawn all the funds she has ever appropriated to develop the general welfare. From taxation, millions upon millions are derived to subsidize rail-roads, and lines of steamships, improve rivers and harbours, build school-houses, forts, and penitentiaries, endow science or art and make war.

Now, wherein do the merits of these surpass the securing of free, productive and remunerative labor to every one of the people? Can there be a matter of greater general interest than this? The first Polytechnic Township may be made to reimburse the expense of its own creation. This it could do by easy instalments without the burden of interest; and afterwards it would be made to pay its proper proportion of general taxes. The amount reimbursed by the first township should be applied to building and furnishing a new one like itself; this one should also reimburse its own cost, which should be used to erect a third, and so on without limit. Thus the original advance made by society would serve many times over and over.

But, objects Political Economy, the amount required in the beginning would be enormous.

Well, replies Social Economy, even were it so, society must do its bounden duty, whatever may be the cost; but it is false to pretend that the amount of the necessary *advances* would be enormous. Two millions of dollars would, including the price of land, be enough to build and

furnish a township for a population of ten thousand. Compare this with the unproductive expenses of a large army and short war; or even with the cost of a single iron clad ship, and decide which outlay should be most cheerfully incurred.

But, says Political Economy, what mighty means of fraud, corruption, embezzlement and oppression, would this movement furnish to the State officers and agents having charge of it.

Far be it from me, answers Social Economy, to propose that the State should be the sole founder, or that having founded she should retain ownership and control. She should make her advances under the well defined right of inspection and verification by committees of the original co-operators: those who would subsequently be obliged to reimburse the cost from their own hard work. The establishment, when completed, would be delivered to them, and they would be independent in its administration. The relation of the government towards them would, as regards the property, be only that of a creditor, with the right to interfere by foreclosure in case of a violation of the conditions of the transfer, or failure to repay the original cost. I am individualistic as far as possible in every way not practically subversive of the principle of the-Average-Labor-Time-Standard-of-Exchangeable-Value.

But, says Political Economy, when you say that society is bound to furnish labor to those who cannot obtain it through private enterprise, you add words implying that private enterprise, *shall* bring or pay to labor an adequate reward. Would you encourage strikers and insure their success? Would you have society take sides with strikers? Would you hold society responsible for fluctuations in the rate of wages?

Of course I would, answers Social



Economy; for it is not merely to secure starvation wages that the Polytechnic Township is devised; but in order that manful labor shall have a manful reward,—a reward fit for a human being,—a reward suited to a moral and intellectual nature, rather than to that of a beast of burden. It is to renew himself morally and intellectually, as well as physically, with the hope of progressing toward the enjoyment of every thing his perfect nature requires, that man has recourse to toil. “It is written: not on bread alone doth man live, but every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.” To withhold this heaven-prescribed reward, is the same, in effect, as to refuse the right to labor itself. To say that the one did not imply the other would be derisive. If a man’s labor produces what is requisite for the nurture of these three, body, intellect and morality, he should enjoy that nurture; for it is the sweat of his own brow. To deprive him of any part of it is a grievous wrong, condemned by the word of God; and society, by making private offers of pitiful wages the reason for refusing fully restorative toil, would practically defeat the right to labor and live. Away with such deceitful pretexts.

But, persisting Political Economy remarks, evidently the projector’s idea of providing employment and support for those who are now unwillingly idle, is a transitory or incidental pretext. Evidently it is expected that the movement, so limited and special at first, would, by gradual extension, absorb all labor, all commerce and trade, and develop an economic order entirely new; in one word, change the face of the world.

Certainly, replies Social Economy, I said so at the outset. Such indeed, is the main purpose of the plan, and such no doubt would be the result, if it were

fairly carried out. It would be a *six* hour movement; and, notwithstanding such a shortening of the hours of labor, an anti-usury movement; for it would root out profit and other causes of usury. It would of its own force and effect put a stop to the gouging of labor by enterprisers and commercial speculators; and therefore capital, yielding no selfcreative increase, would be worth itself, dollar for dollar; “only that, and nothing more.” It would leave the people leisure, in the midst of plenty, to gain knowledge, to satisfy religious convictions, and to gratify athletic, recreative and esthetic tastes. It is the grandest and most feasible plan of peaceful and progressive revolution, in the interest of the toilers, that can, under present circumstances, be devised. Oh! how beautiful would the world be, if this one thing of securing labor *and its full reward* to all men, were once realized. The master enterprisers and appropriators fear it with a livid fear, hate it with a crimson rage, resist it by desperate efforts, and predict that extraordinary evils would flow from it. But Oh! it should be the *ideal of the toilers*, the polar star of their efforts, the anchor of their hope. In their party platforms, at the ballot box, and from the legislature they should demand its establishment. It is par-excellence the initial scheme of their industrial salvation, and the forecast of their moral, their religious, and their intellectual elevation. It is pregnant with all desired relief, full of the seed of happiness. At the same time it exacts only *justice*; for it only proposes to *society* to fulfil at once the duty she owes to all those who being unemployed, are nevertheless willing to earn an honest living by their labor. Come let us “go for it” all together, in solid and unanimous array.

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